skelter

THE NORTH-EASTS MUSIC MAGAZINE.

issue no.5
JULY AUGUST
40p

rival savages
the selecter
girlschool
japan
s.p.k.

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Karen Barrett chats with glam-boys made good and reckons there's more to them than meets the mascara'd eye.

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a CRAZY PROJECT publication ... 86 Nile Street, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear.

Surgical Systems Selective Penis Planning Pornography Klinik Korporation Kontrol

Extract from 'Dokument 1':

"THE PROJECT IDEAL IS TO EXPRESS THE CONTENT OF VARIOUS PSYCHOPATHOLOGICAL CONDITIONS, ESPECIALLY SCHIZOPHRENIA, MANIC DEPRESIVE PSYCHOSIS, MENTAL RETARDATION AND PARANOIA."

Mmmm... A long ramble through ineptitude... convulsive literature...HAH!

"Oh, you're so PROFESSIONAL!" says Tone Generator, odd-eyed member of SPK. Oh... DAMN RIGHT! YES, SIR! Can't even get the bloody tape recorder to work, but I'm a PRO! YEP!

OH! CHRIST!.. inaudible. THIS IS GOING TO BE DIFFICULT!

Judith Bailey smiles wryly, seems to spend most of her time helping this trembling wreck chaotically blunder his way into the eponymous interview situation with Surgical Penis Klinik... she's getting used to it. I'm so predictable: predictably inept! Jack Chill, hideous replica of Mark Inmonger, tries not to worry - and fails! 'I have a duty to my readers'. Oh dear!

"Get on with it! We want some INFORMATION!" (Not a bad idea, actually - Ed.) Angry readers' jaws clamp around my throat! GULP!.. And yet SPK tolerate my bumbling foolishness... THIS IS GOING TO BE WORTH IT.

Systems Planning Korporation convulsively writhing and foaming in various outputs:

Operator - synthesizers, rhythms, treatments, vocals.
Mr Clean - technician.
Tone Generator - synthesizers, treatments.
Wilkins - guitars, bass, tapes, vocals.

Always, always evasive. And SPK skin changes so rapidly that The Quest becomes harder and the road ahead is peppered with concealed craters and ditches...but... THEY MUST GO ON!... smashing through sneering ignorance, ignoring lack of interest, making it harder, harder, always, always... every twist and turn a new name, same initials, S...P...K... emblazoned in their own blood. SURGICAL PENIS KLINIK was burned in a fit of necessary self-immolat-

ion; SELECTIVE PORNOGRAPHY CONTROL rises from the ashes... they have pruned themselves... new, more fertile growth is the obvious result - RISK and CHANCE is their new regime.

SYSTEMS PLANNING KORPORATION... A new name from an old order... the US chemical warfare developments division. SPK have thrown down the gauntlet, it is up to us to pick it up... their music is our SALVATION! I really, really believe this; I have NO other motive in writing. We all need to be cleansed; horror after horror is thrown our way, the poison forced into our bloodstreams in a so-called 'free society'.

Extract from 'Dokument 1':

"INFORMATION OVERLOAD SUPERSEDES NORMAL RATIONAL THOUGHT STRUCTURES, FORCING DEVIATION INTO LESS RESTRICTIVE MENTAL PROCEDURES OF 'SO-CALLED' MENTAL ILLNESS."

Blatant pornography/drug side-effects/ psychotropic neuroleptic chemical warfare/ paranoia/obsessive compulsive neuroses/ retards... desperate reality after desperate reality... STRATEGIC PSYWAR KAMPAIGN is the only emetic and still they refuse to preach, never NEVER condescending. Obscurity drenches their work; Operator knows that ultimately the choice is ours...

"The audience is free to take whatever meaning they want from whatever the sounds say."

SPK have dreams... a cohesive search for... for... PERFECTION: bred out of disillusionment with almost everything they see and hear around them, and yet they always seem to tell themselves "Must try harder"... They all possess the three main ingredients: heart, guts and vision. Where other groups soften, SPK strengthen; weakness is not part of their make-up. They see beauty where others see ugliness, pride where others see shame... this group were BORN out of pain. Operator was a psychiatric nurse ("Psychologists should be kept AWAY from mental patients."), mostly alcoholics and senile dementia. WE turn away, HE walks on... and still people laugh.

Systems Planning Korporation are a battering ram against mental and physical prisons, but when one door opens, another one shuts... MUST TRY HARDER... The only door still open, the chance to attract people with records... one single, 'Slogun'/'Factory' (INdustrial Records). BUY IT! BUY IT! As Al Robinson would say, "If you ain't got 'Slogun', then you ain't got a record collection." (Giggle) (Actually, I think Al would say something to the effect that 'Slogun' is a load of shite, Mark - ED.)

SPK: Throbbing Gristle copyists, an incestuous relationship. LIES! RUBBISH! SPK are autonomous... the single is on Industrial because they had no money. It was a re-release only after much analysis.

SPK: "Shock! Horror! Gimmick!" Cliche after cliche after cliche... banality butts and bruises them, yet is constantly repelled! SPK are the most frighteningly REAL band ever! They are unsettling, and no Anadin or Disprin is going to help you THIS time, Bucko! THERE IS NO EASY WAY OUT ... NO ESCAPE.

Distorted... derailing, the onlooker's senses are viciously attacked! The group are surprised by this - they do not realise their full power - and yet they will expel and destroy every diseased particle in your mind and body... if YOU give THEM the chance!

And... a new record... (record? record of what? Torment?.. Authorised torture?) is out now: 'INformation Overload Unit', a not so hidden reference to schizo-jamming and advertising saturation... "An everyday story of human existance..."... splutter... choke... CHOKE ON IT!

Still moving, swerving in and out, jabbing, jabbing, constantly changing, instability of their own making/requirement; but now, external pressures block their road - and yet these people STILL PROGRESS! Anybody else would have crumbled by now... Clean goes... Wilkins stays... Operator and Tone go back to Australia... they are being KICKED out... out of their squat and out of this country... fascists and SPK are obviously uneasy bed companions. They lived in Coronation Buildings, a tenement where the rats ring up the Samaritans. All poverty is fragranted with the scent of Royalty... enjoy the Royal wedding, folks... will the choirs drown the noise of three million unemployed stomachs rumbling?

Despite the chaos, the group are convinced (I am convinced) that they will continue the struggle... It will NOT be in vain... It cannot be in vain... It MUST not be in vain... I'll be behind them... Will you?

This nation's purveyors of good taste, 'the music press', have been contacted. SPK rang them up, hoping to be able to pass on information... Journalists, true to form, pass the buck! This band do not need phoney critics, they need a demanding inquisitive audience. Their music, their battering, crushing, screeching, whining, forceful, careering, disrupting noise, cries out to be heard, shrieks to be absorbed, a howl of pain above the yells of aimless suffering, a flowering truth in a garden of mendacity! SPK! Shocking! Persuasive! Kinetik!

Meanwhile, back on the floor, the emanciated Judith, entranced by the single and subsequent hearing of the LP, was compelled to ask if the original Italian futurists had any influence on the group.

Phew! Helped out by my thin friend again. This corpulent writer breathes a foul-smelling sigh of relief: that should keep the conversation flowing! Hah!

At first, Operator seemed dumbfounded! Futurists suggested Naked Lunch and their scummy ilk, but then he recalled Luigi Russollo and his noise music... an impression was made by that, yes, also German groups such as DAF, but SPK are as original as any band can be. They are walking their own tightrope, their lives are in their own hands. For them, HONESTY is the ONLY policy, and there is no room to be misconstrued.

Extract from 'Dokument 1':

"SPK IS TRYING TO BE A VOICE FOR THOSE INDIVIDUALS CONDEMNED TO THE SLOW DECAY OF MENTAL HOSPITALS AND CHEMICAL/ELECTRO/SURGICAL THERAPY, WITHOUT FETISHISING THEM INTO BLATANT ENTERTAINMENT PRODUCT. SONICS FOR MANICS AIMS TO BE A VECHILE FOR EXPLORING MENTAL EXPERIENCES THROUGH SOUND."

And that is one thing they have to avoid. It won't be easy, but they will try to smooth things out, to clarify (one of Wilkins' many virtues), and to illuminate. With the record comes 'Dokument 1', an information sheet. Imparting knowledge to heighten the new independence they have found with their own Side Effects label... saying and doing what THEY want; one of the few groups under NOBODY'S thumb. At last SPK are as near as they will ever get to contentment with their sound; and: I am sure that, for once, contentment will not go hand in hand with complacency. Just the opposite... pushing forward... continually changing... until finally... ECSTASY! This does not mean futile escape from a dull existance - 'living for the weekend'- don't let anybody tell you THAT'S what music's about, but... but... what SPK will do is alter your perception... change your reality... improve... make things better... HEAL! That is the importance of music.

That is the function of SPK.

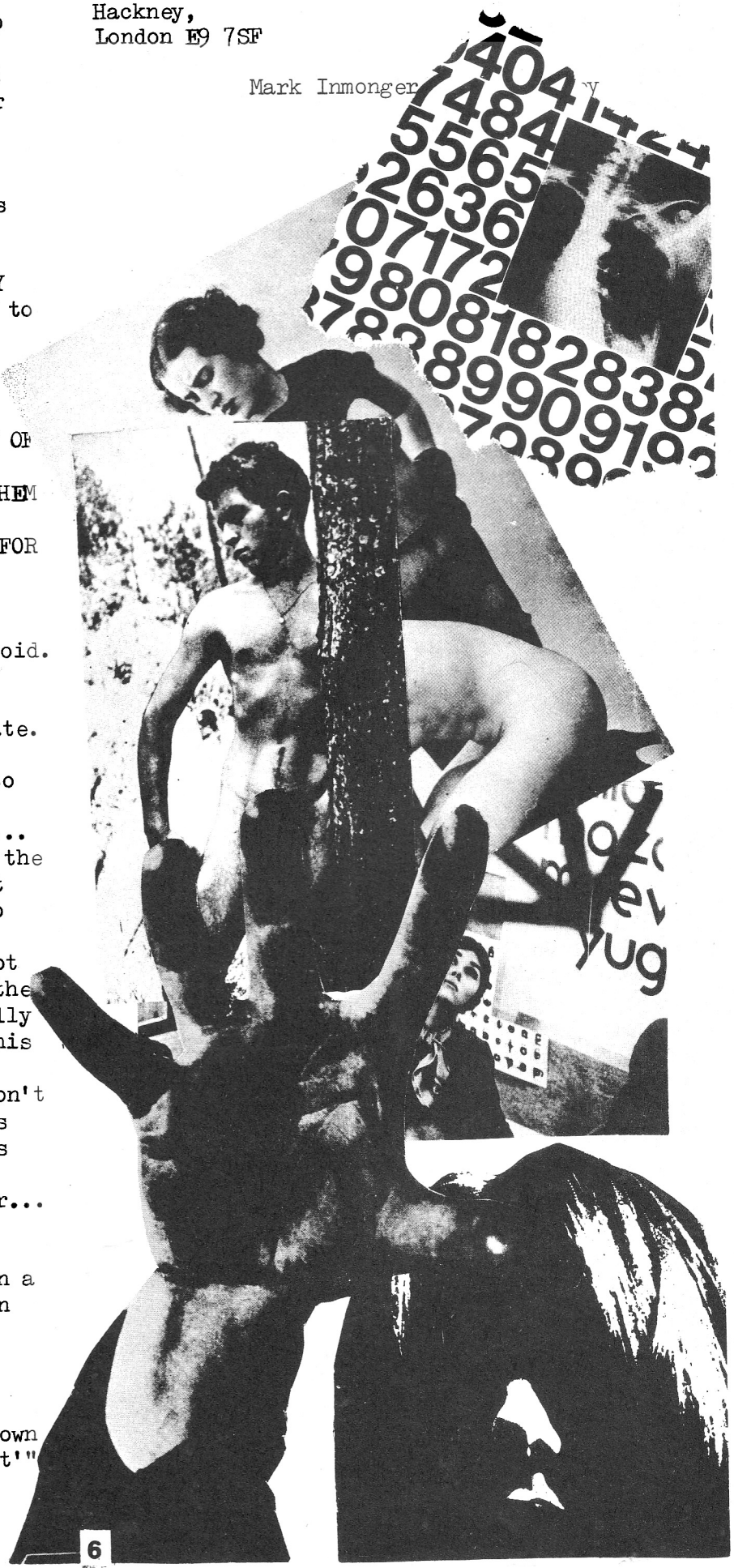
"And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin, when I am pinned and wriggling on the wall, then how should I begin..."
(T.S.Eliot)

"I like violent change, convulsive thought, ripping from one thing to another so that nobody can tie you down and say 'You ARE this... You ARE that'"
(Operator - SPK)

Endnote: SPK would like to hear from anyone interested in what they are doing, especially those with an interest in the history of psychotic disorder. Write to:

Mike Wilkins,
15 King Edwards Rd,
Hackney,
London E9 7SF

Mark Inmonger



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RIVAL SAVAGES

If you walk around Newcastle's city centre with your eyes open, you cannot fail to notice the multitude of posters hailing the the release of Rival Savages' debut single, 'Get Some'. The 45 was released in November of last year and has so far managed to sell out of its original pressing of 1,000 copies. It had been the band's policy since their conception in June 1980 to release a single as soon as possible, thus by-passing the path a newly formed band takes, namely that of playing as many gigs as possible in an effort to build up some kind of favourable local reputation. I asked Alan Brown, the band's guitarist, why they chose a policy of 'single first', and what were the Savages' reasons for their reluctance to play live gigs.

"What we did in previous bands we had all played in was to slog our way around the pub circuit, where we used to get only four or five people coming to see us. We got absolutely no recognition; people would just have a few drinks and then leave. We felt that if we could play at a club where people came ESPECIALLY for the music, we'd have a better chance of getting across. So what we've done is try to create an audience first by bringing out a single straight away, as opposed to going around the pubs trying to win an audience."

It did emerge later in the interview that Rival Savages haven't resigned themselves to being only a recording band. As bassman Paul Horsely explains: "What we would like to do is to hire a reasonable sized hall in Newcastle on a regular basis, put on a good support band, maybe a disco too, and make it a good night out for all concerned. We don't want to be just a recording band, but we will keep bringing out singles."

It's easy to understand Rival Savages' reluctance to play the Newcastle pub circuit, a grind which has lead to the demise of many local bands, and of the thinking behind the release of 'Get Some' - an excellent example of the band's sound. The 45 could be classed as a 'protest song' with its featured lyrics such as:

'Get some fodder from the front line/
Say goodbye to the ones you love/
Hello to God above.'

The single marches on incessantly, with Alan Brown's dislocated guitar playing superbly backed by Paul Horsely's pounding bass lines and Bob Clark's emphatic drumming. The vocals are attributed to Paul MacTagget, who has since left the band due to his love of

DISARMED BY COLIN GREEN

football and drinking clashing with the band's rehearsals. Shaun Mallet has taken over vocal duties, and is currently involved in intensive rehearsals with the band.

Alan Brown is Rival Savages' chief songwriter, a task which he finds particularly agreeable, as he himself confesses:

"I wasn't a prolific writer until I joined this band. When I was in Joe Soap and The Lifebouys (his last band) I had written only five songs in a year; since joining Rival Savages', I've written twenty songs in six months!"

Brown's lyrical subject matter isn't the standard fare of adolescent love, etc, but, as in 'Year Of The Child', about kids dying of starvation in West Africa.

"What I try to do when I write a song is, firstly, make it so that people can dance to it. Then, when they're dancing to a song such as 'Year Of The Child', I hope that they'll be interested enough to take an interest in the lyric. That's about it - to try to put some kind of message over while people are dancing."

Although it's a worthy idea, I'm afraid I wouldn't pin too much hope on most of the audiences in the North East forsaking their pints of Ex to listen to songs about malutrition-stricken five-year-olds.

So what about the future? Do the band feel that they'll have to move to London to gain recognition?

Alan Brown: "I'm very wary about giving up my job to go and live in London. What I'd like to do is play down there at weekends, and then come back to Newcastle. I know that doesn't sound especially dedicated, but, unfortunately, I'm in no position to give up my day job."

It's fair to say that quite a number of local bands, after putting so much time, effort and money into their first disc, disappear into obscurity after apathy and disenchantment set in if the record doesn't sell well. So far for Rival Savages, this isn't the case; their enthusiasm is still there, their record has sold/is selling well, and their approach and application is still fresh.

Rival Savages are TOGETHER, and will stay that way for a long time to come I'm sure. Their next plan of action is to release a second 45 in the summer: I'll buy it and so should YOU!

In fact, you should 'Get Some' NOW!

Colin Green

THE 45's

"How do I regard Newcastle now? Er, with fond... disgust! I've been having fond recollections of the people who are living there, but it's the place: it's so depressive... it kills anything artistic."

Firstly, scene seekers, an aural press hand-out from the one-time Newcastle pop group, The 45s.

"Shall we give you the usual story? Well, our one and only record, 'Couldn't Believe A Word' came out on Stiff Records in 1979, and we've done absolutely nothing of consequence since! Actually, I lie... We have done a lot of drugs and drink since then!! You can quote us on that, and tell all the folks in Newcastle that this is the best job we've ever had. Tell 'em we're having lots of fun living down here in London town!"

A mind-jogging history of Los 45s begins in Newcastle in 1978, when four likeable students (bloody students) came together, in their words, "to try to get another eight people and recreate the heady incenses of the Motown and Asbury Park axis."

Love and stuff,
The Ed.

Things changing like things do, and only managing to obtain a third-rate jazz saxophonist (later ousted), they eventually found their feet in covering old Hollies numbers, covering the cost of unprofitable gigs, and sometimes covering the dance floor with happy people whilst playing their own wonderful songs. They became theonly group in town who's sound stemmed from 60's British pop, and this was reflected in their ever-brightening pop songwriting abilities; to this day I remember the classic pop structure of their 'Couldn't Believe a Word' single. In a world nearing the end of its Punk Rock tether, they released a bright, baby blue, pop single...

The single initially came about from an excellent demo tape recorded by local good guy, Mike Ray, and it eventually gave Phil (curly hair and girl), John (back view, phoning mum), Jamie (sucker with the Beatle bass), and Paul (a singing drummer!) a chance to record and release their single through London's not-at-all-famous Chopper Records.

"Chopper said they'd release the single in four weeks, and they did. At the time, it seemed like the best thing to do. Lots of music-biz people have offered us so much and then done nothing for us. Now we basically say to music-biz people that unless they can offer us money - instantly - they can fuck off!"

The answers are at the end of my gossip. And no cheating!

1. **Name Marianne Faithfull's first record release?**
2. **Who produced it?**
3. **What is the name of the lead singer with The Small Faces?**
4. **What was Sandie Shaw's first record called?**
5. **Who wrote and originally recorded Dave Clark's *Over And Over*?**
6. **What is Martha of The Vandellas full name?**
7. **Who originally recorded Dusty Springfield's big hit, *I Just Don't Know What To Do With Myself*?**
8. **What is Dusty's real name and where was she born?**
9. **What does the J. in Billy J. Kramer stand for?**
10. **Who wrote *Needles And Pins* and originally recorded it?**

Well, how do you think you did? I got all the answers right. But only 'cos I knew the answers before I asked the questions.

You've got to be a bit clever, you know....

Y'see, the way the business side of pop music is conducted makes groups like Les 45s great fans and believers of yer pop ethic; a little twisted and less open than when they inhabited good ol' Newcastle. They told me that they would not sign a recording contract without first having an advance totalling not less than £30,000. Anything less than the big beans could not make a dent in the massive record industry market-place, an industry run more along the lines of Tesco's supermarket than a cultural, artistic warehouse. It would seem that the 45's SEE the pop game and want to get IN IT.

Fab

The most intuitive thing they have done to this end, crazily enough, is to start busking in the Underground s stations and streets of our bloated capital. They've built up an actual street following around Leicester Sq/ Covent Garden, and are managing very nicely, cracker-wise, from these pursuits. Their 'street' repetoire consists mainly of early Beatles songs performed on accoustic guitars and tambourines, and they also do this lark outside pubs on the Kings Road.

"Yeah, like the Roebuck, which is THE place to be on a Friday night."

To see the 45s?

"Well... not unless you're slumming from the crowd at Wedgie's disco!"

The devil-may-care enthusiasm of the group has been there even since their early days in Newcastle; I adore groups who go for feeling over expertise, and The 45s' feeling is blatant enthusiasm. In today's rock world, this enthusiasm is easily mis-interpretated by the press as 'a lack of art'. As is expected, The 45s dislike the power of the Music Press and the way it makes heroes and villains.

ANSWERS TO QUIZ

1. "As Tears Go By." 2. Andrew Oldham. 3. Stevie Marriott. 4. As Long As You're Happy. 5. Bobby Byrd. 6. Martha Reeves. 7. Tommy Hunt. 8. Mary O'Brien: Hampstead. 9. It Doesn't. Mr. Kramer's real name is William Ashton. Kramer came from a phone book and the J was added to give it class. 10. Jackie Nitzche and Sonny Bono. Jackie De Shannon.

Phil, John, Jamie and Paul were born and bred in either Sheffield or the Smoke, but having formed in Newcastle, feel more akin to bands here than anywhere else.

"The music that should come from Newcastle is rhythm and blues. The people up there are working people who haven't got any work and are finding it hard to live with that fact." A little too hip-politico for me, but still a worthy comment.

The 45s sound is a slightly off-centre rock'n'roll beat, which was best summed up by the Beatles. It's a very soft-hearted sound and is made possible by their use of non-sophisticated instrumentation and whizzy harmony vocals. And their affection for the 60's probably explains their willingness to be involved in entertaining people. Most of their gigs are dances, as opposed to being 'events'. Comparisons with the busking rockabilly Shaking Pyramids are obvious as the 45s do play some venues without a drum kit, and it's very heartening to hear them knocking out an old Buddy Holly tune or two.

They would also like to be involved with lunchtime gigs, gigs without booze (The Cavern, f'rinstance, never sold drink), gigs with seven groups on a night, Soul packages and all that. Sixties stuff that was supposed to be such fun!!!

"Since we've been in London, our songwriting has become so much..BRIGHTER! The whole thing is delivered from a different perspective. We were insulated against Newcastle's environment 'cos we were at college, basically, with a steady grant coming in, etc. There're a lot of people we really like up there but... y'know what?... I think a lot of them are going to move down to London within the next two or three years.

"It's very sad, but the North East has become a bit of a wasteland, especially when you've spent some time in London, which seems to be insulated against fuckin' depression. No matter what happens anywhere else in the country, London is always prosperous; even the people on the dole are more prosperous! "

And to finish... The 45s, after moving south, starving, and finally finding their own resources - and fun- through busking on the London streets have now decided to move back into the music-biz as they have good offers in the pipeline from Chrysalis and their old firm, Chopper Records. They still like to busk for 5p a throw, and much prefer that to a planned out, video-style existance.

And that's that. I've tried to expla explain The 45s, their position in London and their attitude to Newcastle, their second home, so to speak.

I hope you like them...

T.H.Bogart

PETER A. THOMPSON

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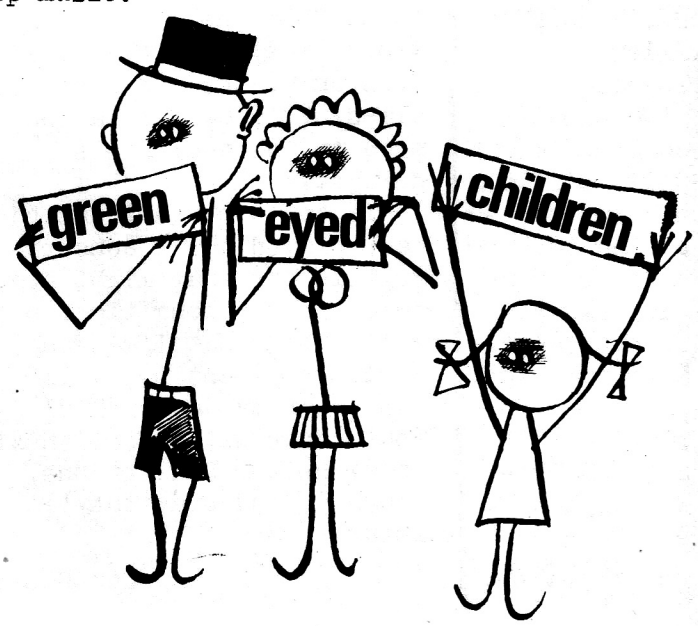
Live Reviews

Green Eyed Children
Prefab Sprout;
Spectro Arts Centre

Monikers are becoming more and more absurd. Relatively unknown bands seem to think that choosing the most inane label possible will, ultimately, bring them instant recognition: The Night The Goldfish Died, We Do It In The Dark, and the ludicrous A Policeman And A Baby crop up with unerring regularity in NME's 'Garageland' features. Amongst the North East's entries in the contest to find the most prodigious title are the Green Eyed Children and Prefab Sprout.

I caught up with the bands when they played Spectro Arts Centre recently, and it was the Green Eyed Children who started the night's entertainment off. Despite being dressed in velvet jackets and tie-dyed trousers, it must be stated that GEC are not ageing Hippies, but a band full of youthful verve: their music is entertaining, full of dance and bonhomie. Their set lasted for well over an hour, during which time they bombarded the audience with well constructed garageland pop music.



The band's main influences seem to be the now defunct Buzzcocks and The Jam, especially on 'Girl Like You', which is very reminiscent of the early Jam. Guitarists Taffy Hughes and Paul Handyside emulate Paul Weller's style well and the rhythm section of David Porthouse (bass) and Mark Simm (drums) create a solid back-drop. 'Girl Of My Dreams' and 'Problems' are perhaps their most original numbers, and titles such as 'Why?' and 'Breaks Me Up' left me convinced that they are avid readers of Marjorie Proops!

It'll probably be a while before the Green Eyed Children have the record companies hammering on their door, but their capacity to write and play good songs will, I'm sure, keep them in gigs until they can develop a more positive style of their own.

Prefab Sprout have had their ambitions, songs, style and points of view more than amply explained in the previous two issues of Helter Skelter, and all I can do is confirm that Paddy McAloon's guitar playing/songwriting is nothing short of superb, and that Martin McAloon (bass) and Mick Salmon (drums) more than adequately add to a band who are overflowing with originality.

Colin Green

New Studeau; Cooperage

The venue, the Cooperage, and two bands from Sunderland the attraction. I'd gone to cover the Toy Dolls, but was more impressed with the support, 'pon my word, a veritable truss among bands, New Studeau.

Bopped? - they fairly charted sixteen times during their first number! Here are the facts: the band are Kev Beston (vocals), Fred Sherrif (guitar), Shaun Riley (bass), Dave Browell (synth), and last but by no meanz beanz least, drummer Matt Youll. They look like a young Skids, the bassist like a degreased and manicured Feargal Sharkey.

Their whole set is razzy, cutting, commercial - ugh, that word - but no insult intended. Songs such as 'Girl In My Heart' have a gutzy beat, no great political preaching or attempts at hidden deep meanings, just pure pop toons, and 'Make You Love Me' is heart rendering stuff. They played this particular song due to the mikes going 'poopees'. Excellent!

Each member of the band plays with total conviction, and the lead and backing vocals, intense yet controlled, sound Squeezish and work to great effect. They may soon have a single out, 'Dancing', not their best track, but miles better than most of the wallah about.

Later, someone said of their set, "It was a good song"; okay, the songs may be similar, but this can be put down to New Studeau's own style or, perhaps, inexperience.

It was a good night and the band enjoyed it, which delighted me as it could mean they'll come back.

SEE this band. I kid you not, John.

Roy Weatherley

Maiden Voyage; Spectro Arts Centre

Details and facts only; absolutely no opinions: what does it matter what I think of Maiden Voyage?...

A free programme you collect at the door which tells you that Maiden Voyage are Dave Clark (drums) Mick Shearman (bass), Tony O'Brian (lead guitar), and Jimmy Page (guitar/vocals). A list of the songs they intend playing. The names of their road-crew: Paul, Rob and Dave. The lyrics to the self-penned 'Sophisticated Woman' ('Slinky cat', 'cute suit', 'bitchiest bitch', 'nobody's girl', 'you kiss her and you blush', 'womanly twitch'.)

Dry ice buckets. Coloured lights. A strobe. Last minute electrical checks by their 'electronics technician', Paul. Serious faces; nervousness; anticipation. Loud guitars and a song written by Page called 'Velvet Cape'. Guitar solos. Loud guitars. Emphatic 'thankyou's to the audience. A version of Rory Gallagher's 'Shadow Play', which sticks to the original. More original songs, loud guitars, solos, thankyou's, dry ice, applause. A song called 'Crash Willow'. A version of 'Jumping Jack Flash' which is two minutes old before I recognise it. LOUD GUITARS. SOLOS. DRY ICE. I head for refreshment in the bar, only to find the Carlsberg has run out. Guinness. Loud guitars. A chat with EMH 16, the support duo from Eternal Asylum, who played with a passion.

Home on the bus. "You work for that Helter Skelter thing, don't you?" says a girl.

Mal Armstrong

Gamma; City Hall Newcastle

It may just be a sign of the times, or bad publicity, but I think it a shame that a man with as much talent as Ronnie Montrose can only be greeted with an audience who's size could only be described as paltry, as was the case for Gamma's recent visit to Newcastle City Hall.

Montrose has had a chequered career, his biggest success coming in the band who's moniker was his surname. Gamma have been together since early 1980, and although their music is not always as basic as that of Montrose (the band), it still has the same drive which stems from Ronnie's guitar playing.

With two excellent albums under their belt, it does seem a pity - not to mention surprise - that the band's first visit to the UK has been met with such apathy.

For those of us who did turn out for their City Hall performance, Gamma provided a real treat in the shape of some excellent music, mostly taken from their 'Gamma 2' album. They even played a version of the old Montrose classic, 'Rock The Nation', much to the audience's delight.

It could be that the band have played their concerts in Britain for what might prove to be a very long time, but let's hope that I'm wrong.

In the meantime, I'll just wear my Gamma UK 81 Tour badge with pride (next to my Helter Skelter one, of course), and pray they'll return soon.

Sam Blewitt

CELEBRATE THE SELECTER

Once again, the best laid plans of mice and man fall foul to the fickle finger of fate: these things are sent to try us.

Y'see, yours truly had just finished compiling an article on one of his favourite bands, The Selecter, which went to inhuman lengths to emphasise just how well they've coped with the considerable traumas of the past twelve months, ie. quitting 2-Tone, finding replacements for Desmond and Charlie, making a follow-up album which surpassed the devastating 'Too Much Pressure', etc, and also asserted this writer's belief that the bad times were over for The Selecter and as long as they stuck together there was every chance that they'd become one of the truly great groups of the eighties when, as Steely Dan bluntly put it, I got the news.

And bad news it was, in more ways than one. Firstly, and most importantly, the decision by vocalist Pauline Black to quit the band and pursue the notorious - and usually disastrous - 'solo career' puts, I believe, the whole future of The Selecter in jeopardy. Neol Davies' immediate Press release statement that the band have every intention of carrying on is heartening, but somehow implausible. The fact is that to the bulk of the good ol' record buying public, Pauline Black actually WAS the Selecter, like it or not. Chances are that by the time you're actually reading this, something else HAS emerged. Who knows?

Secondly, and more selfishly, the bad news meant that I had to tear up my original article and hastily fill in three or four pages with something. So what follows is an interview I had with the band's mentor and lead guitarist Neol Davies which took place shortly before Ms Black's departure, when no-one knew what the future held.

Davies appeared to me to be a shrewd but sincere guy who has nothing but 100% belief in what the Selecter stand for; it came as no surprise that he was quick to counter comments that the band was splitting up in total. The interview took place at Newcastle City Hall, shortly before the band played a meritorious set there, and it went something like this:

Firstly, 1980 was a particularly upheaving one for The Selecter, and although the whole thing was pretty well documented by the national Music Press, I wondered what the long-term effects have been on the band?

Neol Davies: "First of all, it was the only thing to do in the circumstances. What we have now is a situation where The Selecter can get across what it wants to get across, rather than have a blanket of media misinterpretation of what we're doing. We were really sick and tired of getting lumped together with every other 2-Tone band. And what we were trying to get across in the music didn't seem to be getting across.

There were a lot of other things, like being pissed off with the merchandising, the money that was being made by people who had nothing to do with 2-Tone, and the general lack of communication between ourselves and The Specials, who were into their own thing and weren't interested generally in running a label together - which we were. So we just said 'Right, let's cut it', and we left. Jerry's words were that he didn't think 2-Tone had out-lived its usefulness yet, but we felt, fuck this, we're not getting anywhere here; so we set up something of our own."

You're current album has been released through Chrysalis, but do you intend taking other bands under your wing and help them to release records?

Neol Davies: "The possibility is there, but it's not something we're actively going to go out and do just for the sake of it. If we see a really good band who we think should have a record out, but for some reason can't get a record out, we'll do it. But we won't do it if the band isn't ready, because that happened on 2-Tone with The Bodysnatchers and The Swinging Cats. Because of the disorganisation between The Specials and ourselves, those groups just got fucked around."

With the current album, was there a lot of pressure on the band to come up with 'the goods', as it were, following all the upheavals of the previous months?

Neol Davies: "Yeah, I mean, we started recording the day after Charlie and Desmond had gone, so we really felt that we had to get stuck into it. We set about relieving the frustrations that had built up. Y'see, there were so many people who were around the group - or even in the group! - who were basically wrong that we felt it best to have a clean sweep. We got rid of our manager, half the road-crew, tour manager, sound man, people in the band. We just got it together and started doing it properly, instead of getting swept along by the hysterical wave of media misinterpretation that was going on.

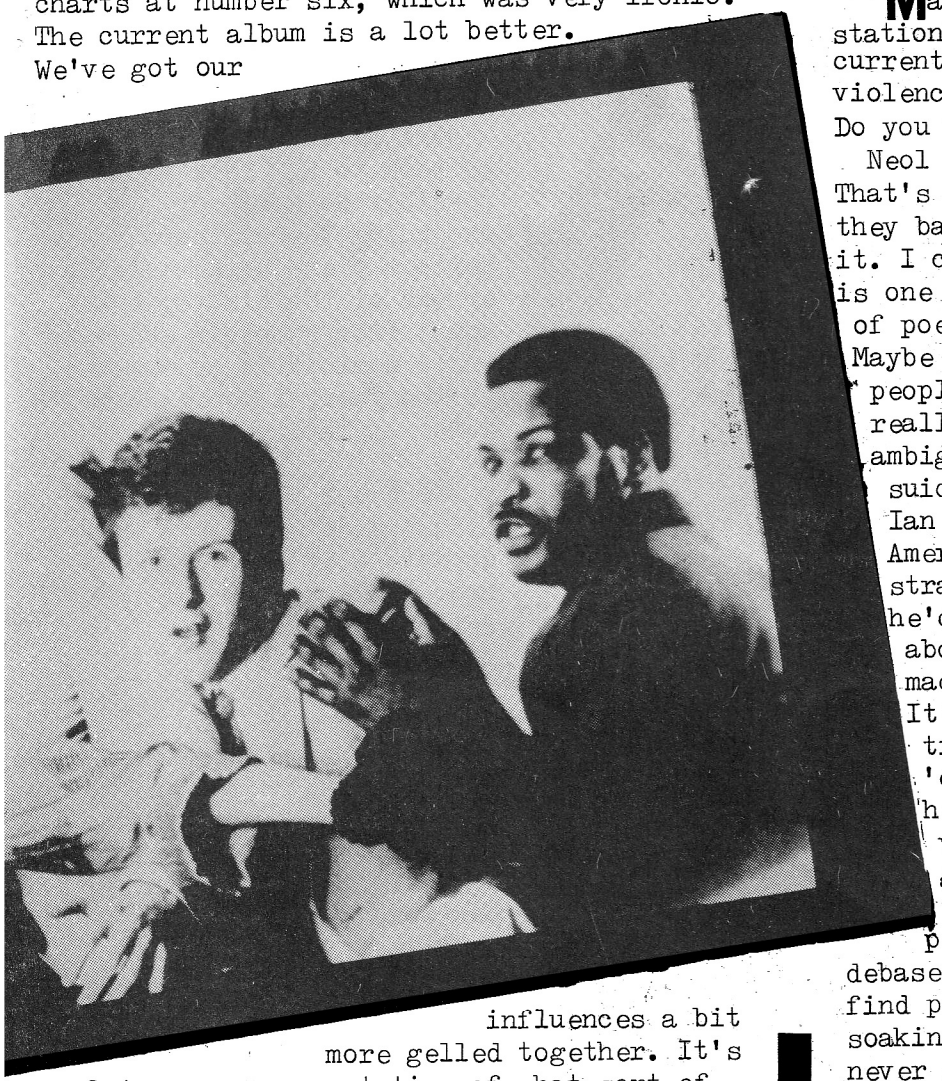
Most of the reporting that's been done on 2-Tone, actually, has been really superficial; it's trivialised everything that we were trying to say. It did get across to a lot of people, but it still didn't work out in the way we wanted it to."

Was the spirit of the band conducive to recording an album at that time?

Neol Davies:"Yeah, I think it was the perfect thing to do. We had the studio time booked, we had the songs, we knew we could make a second album that would be ten times better than the first, so it was a very natural, easy, logical thing to do."

There seems to be less ska influence on the 'Celebrate The Bullet' album; it sounds more considered, there's an emphasis on musical space...

Neol Davies:"Yeah, on the first album we were all feeling very jerky! That's how it came out sounding the way it did. It was aptly titled, I think, 'Too Much Pressure'. We did it in three weeks, and there were all kinds of things interupting the sessions: we had the wrong producer, there were arguments within the group, and it just came out sort of mutilated really. And it went into the charts at number six, which was very ironic. The current album is a lot better. We've got our



influences a bit more gelled together. It's a lot more representative of what sort of band The Selecter are."

I agree that 'Celebrate The Bullet' is a better album than 'Too Much Pressure'. Some of the songs I found particularly interesting, especially 'Bristol And Miami'.

Neol Davies:"Yeah, Pauline wrote it. It's a comment on what happened last year at those riots in Bristol and Miami; a reminder if you like. It's a subject that needs people to think about it, not just sweep it under the carpet. Prejudice and racism seem to be inherent in the human race at the moment, due, I think, to all the conditioning that everyone goes through. Everybody's subjected to it, and people just don't seem to understand it. People have got to start thinking about it a lot more and try to come to terms with it. They've got to think in terms of what being alive means, y'know, stop believing what you read in the papers or see on TV and try formulating your own views. A lot of the songs on the current album are angled that way, really. Somebody once described us as a band searching for a solution, but we're not really, no more than anybody else. Even if we found solutions, we wouldn't start forcing them down everyone's neck - preaching, that's crazy! The best that any group can hope for is to communicate a mood or emotion through their music and lyrics."

Many people - especially the radio stations - were confused by the title of the current album, and interpreted it as a pro-violence record, which of course it wasn't. Do you regret useing that as the title?

Neol Davies:"It's supposed to be ironic. That's the point that the radio missed when they banned it; a lot of people have missed it. I can't understand why, because irony is one of the most used things in any kind of poetry or lyric writing or anything. Maybe I made the irony a bit too heavy for people to take, I dunno. It's a song really about... I tried to make it a bit ambiguous and connect a kind of personal suicide with a world suicide. Like when Ian Curtis killed himself, we were in America at the time and it had a kind of strange effect - why he'd done it, how he'd done it - and I started thinking about suicide: about the world going mad and committing itself to suicide. It's a comment about that really. I was trying to use a sense of irony to say 'celebrate the bullet', 'cos there's a hell of a lot of glorification of violence - and acceptance of glorification of violence. People turn on the TV every night to watch people being abused, humiliated, debased just for entertainment, which I find pretty sick. If they want to carry on soaking up all that crap, then the world's never gonna get better. Until they start wising-up and thinking 'What is this rubbish that people are making money out of?', the world will be a bad place. It's a complicated subject but, nevertheless, it's one that we feel we want to tackle, it's one that we believe in. Maybe it's too soon for people to latch on to it, because everyone seems to be into the New Romantics at the moment and wonderfully forgetting about things, putting their heads under the carpet. I'm afraid The Selecter isn't like that, we want to face up to these issues."

Talking of violence, it hardly seems that The Selecter can play a gig without the national Music Press dwelling on the subject of violence at gigs...

Neol Davies:"Exactly: they're misguiding people. This has been a constant frustration

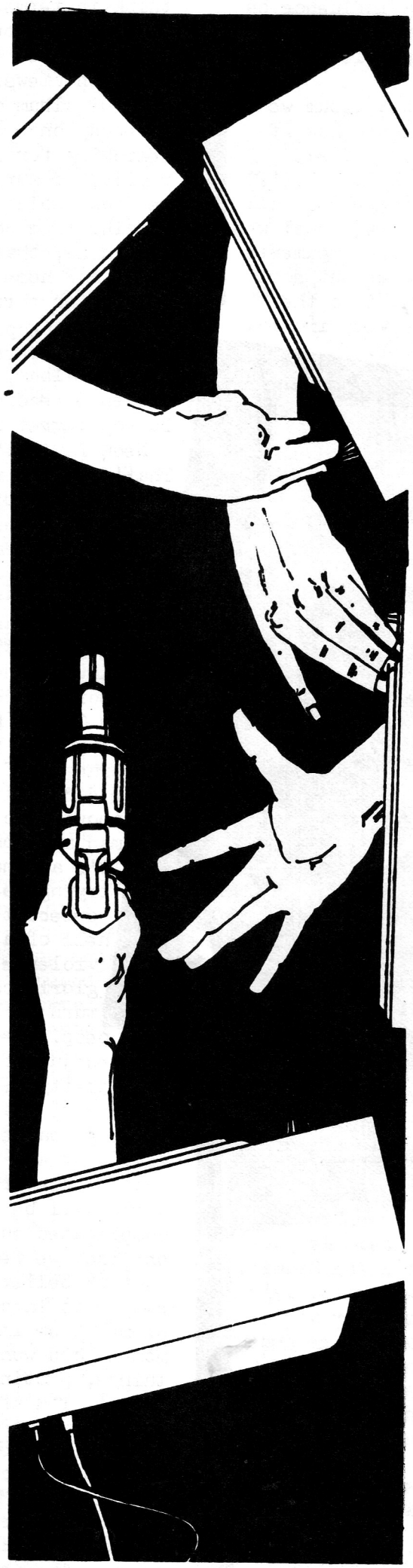
because we've hardly had ANY trouble at our gigs. It's happened because we were a 2-Tone band, and Madness and The Specials have had a lot of trouble at their gigs. It's just not true. A lot of people are under this impression because of media misinterpretation. It's really annoying because we've done a hell of a lot of gigs, a hell of a lot of touring, and the amount of trouble we've had at gigs has been minimal compared to other bands. It's really annoying, but finally we're being able to break out of that and people are beginning to see us a bit more for what we are. We should have left 2-Tone after 'On My Radio' really, but we decided that we could work within it, make a go of it. And look what happened."

The recent 'Dance Craze' movie: how did you get involved with that and what did you think of it?

Neol Davies:"We got involved with it in a very strange way, actually, because our British tour of about a year ago came straight after the 2-Tone tour - which should have been filmed..."

Yeah, I thought that would have made a great movie...

Neol Davies:"Yeah, that was another major source of frustration for us, and for me personally, because I was saying 'We should be filming this', and Jerry (Dammers) was saying 'What for?' Anyway this American guy called Joe Masso said that he was going to make a film, and filmed three of our gigs. And it wasn't a particularly good tour in lots of ways, but that's beside the point. After that we went to America and while we were there they filmed some more groups - Bad Manners, The Specials - and when you look at the finished film you can see that it was done in a completely uncoordinated fashion. It was really a salvage job. We had



to do all the sound again because everything was out of synch, and then we got accused of doing endless over-dubs and things. One of the good things about the film is that under 18's can get in to see it and, I suppose, it was us as we were last year. We're older and wiser and we've got a broader outlook now, and we're more in control of what we're doing."

What sort of plans do you have for the future?

Neol Davies:"We'd like to go back to New York and possibly do a bit of recording there. There are various plans being tossed around at the minute, but apart from complete and utter world domination by the end of the year, I suppose that's about it really!"

No doubt those 'various plans' didn't include the departure of Pauline Black from The Selecter fold. As I write, there hasn't been any mention of possible replacements or of any specific reasons for Ms Black's sudden pursuit of a solo career, so I'm unable to comment on either of those particular points.

What I can comment on, however, is the total commitment and unnerving honesty which The Selecter have demonstrated on their two superb albums. It would be a sad day for UK music if they decided to call it a day following their recent crisis because right now when the charts are chocker block with turkeys dressing up as Dick Turpins or the knights of the round table, the last thing we need is the loss of a band who feel the need to question injustices and write songs about relevant issues.

I only hope that they continue to do so for a long time to come.

Mal Armstrong

Capt TWEE
#
SOMETHING FLEW PAST TWEE, INTO HIS OWN HOME..HE SHOULD NEVER HAVE RETURNED.....
R&W.
by QUESTIONABLE PRODUCTIONS released thru CRAZY PROJECTS
MOTHER

Hi De Hi, campers! What, with young, virile Ronnie near to being snuffed in his prime all 'cos some loony went to the pictures to see 'Taxi Driver'... I am moved. TO WRITE!!! And now that we learn that there are some 55 million hand guns twitching in the US, I must make clear to any budding pop stars out there that we here at Helter Skelter prefer to get our lead from church roofs only, thankyou, and not from any maniac who has suffered from a bad review in these very pages!

But on to new music... To start with, Artery were damn cute and had some great chewns in their noisy set when I saw them recently. 'Cars In Motion', however, is not so wonderful. Being their new single I'd expected it to make as much charming sense as their live performance, but it leaves me as confused as an NME writer and some like it that way, I hear. A bitter disappointment.

A 'Back To Songs' campaign? New York's Db's happen to have some very good ones, and must be the classiest new American band around. Their two-man vocal melodies really are something different and remind me of The Hollies, Searchers, Sixties. When I saw them recently they were... IMMEDIATE!: A return from the extrovert psychosis from some of our recent past.

'Roping Wild Bears' is the current e.p. from The Raybeats, who were on the same package as The Db's, and are a traditional early instrumental group a la Shadows, but with an '80s panache. They still wear matching suits, cover songs by The Ventures, and even perform a version of 'Apache'. Did you know, scam-mongers, that this here scribe was born not 100yds from Hank B. Marvins place of birth, and that his father ran a barber's shop in Stanhope Street, Newcastle? Stunned? So was Hank!

Hank made records that were more popular, vastly different, and nearly as good as Liverpool's Dalek I Luv You, who feature ex-Teardrops guitarist Alan Gill as a fully paid up member, it would seem. Skelter addicts will no doubt have read our feature on T.Ex in issue no.4, and by now have realised that the interview took place BEFORE the band split (A bit inconsiderate of them, I thought - Ed.) Yes, we know that Helter Skelter SHOULD run like a Swiss Watch, but it's more usually run like a Swiss cheese - and I know you wouldn't have it any other way. Anyway, Dalek I Luv You's 'Heartbeat' is a truly great record, although my punch-line is a fraction better.

The Highland Enclosures, the last World Cup, and the hastened degredation of Scottish folk have hindered the talents of the latest six or so groups who've recently walked down from the hills of the North (romantics!) Altered Images have a singer called Claire, and she is their only reason to live. Buy 'Dead Pop Stars', their single, scratch the 'A' side and play only the 'B' side, 'Sentimental'/'It's a Nice Dream, You'll Like It'. Indeed, it is SPECIAL because

this band actually HAVE the songs that the rest of the meandering amateur experimentalists are scratching after.

Orange Juice, with 'Poor Old Soul', are being blatantly more commercial than Sheena Easton. All I can say is that this record sounds as if it were recorded by nothing less than Real Human Beings, who care about other people. As Mein Kapitan, Editor Mal, always says, "Trust your own feelings - everytime!"

The only other variable left between Orange Juice and Sheena Easton is major record company muscle. You know, sudden appearances on TOTP, the organisation to be able to place fifty records in every major record shop in the country (ready for the post-TOTP rush on Saturday), not to mention a £4,000 deposit with the BPI, which is important if you're looking for chart action.

Josef K are noisy and poppy, as they prove with 'Sorry For Laughing', and The Fire Engines are noisy, usually not as poppy as their current single, and not quite as good as much of the Press are making out. Cuban Heels are better musicians, as they prove with 'Walk On Water', and are closely tied to The Shaking Pyramids, who should have roared into the charts on the recent rockabilly wave with 'Take A Trip'. Methinks someone didn't get paid off at the top, as usual. Shaking Pyramids are a bit purist, but ten times more inspiring than the sometimes flabby Stray Cats.

Although I'm a big fan of singles these days and don't puchase many albums, the last two LPs I've bought have been the first couple recorded by The Undertones, who still remain the greatest. And the beauty of them is that they aren't even TRYING to push back the frontiers of anything, whether it be music fashion (ha!) or football. John O'Neill must, surely, be rated as THE real teen pop songwriting power. If you've heard their new LP, you'll know of the maturity they've gained since their painful break-up with Sire Records. 'Sad Girl' is a classic pop song, and I rest my case and allow you to snigger as I confess that I love these boys!

Glad to see The Scars finally resurfacing with a fine LP, 'Author, Author', and single, 'All About You'. Skelterers will remember me raving on about their 'They Came And Took Her' single in the very first issue of this comic. I was disappointed when I saw them live a little after that, and they appeared confused and confusing. They were also, lest we forget, forerunners to the New Romantics (i.e. dressed up and had odd haircuts), but that was long before the term had ever been coined. Nowadays, they seem to have sorted themselves out into a force to be reckoned with - so you can't say that I can't pick the Boss from the Dross! El Smuggo! Aside, I still think the Electric Prunes and Love are the greatest ever.

Every fanzine must have its Crass bit, and here's mine. As regards their records - they convey nothing to me, period. Their writings in various papers, however, convey extremely strong attitudes, and I'd just like to quote - and heartily agree with - Crass's Penny Rimbaud when he says:

"OK, here's your answer: Anarchy/Peace/Contradiction. As an anarchist I stand against ALL authority (It would seem to me on this level that an anarchist is almost, by nature, a pacifist) and in doing so I must also recognise that if I stand against authority imposed from the outside, I have NO RIGHT to impose on others MY authority. At the root of anarchist thought is the belief of the 'right of the individual' to do and be whosoever and whatsoever they choose - it isin that belief that lies the paradox. If I as an individual demand self autonomy, I am bound to recognise it in others, thus, if I choose to act in a situation - for example, the prevention of gig violence - I have no right to expect help with MY actions. I have every right to hope that someone will help me, but I CANNOT and WILL NOT implicate others in MY decisions as it would represent the deepest contradiction to my basic beliefs.

"I believe it is highly dangerous to polarise an 'enemy'; personally, I feel no more animosity to the Right than to the Left. I don't believe in power-politics and that is, however one looks at it, what they represent. I dont believe that any REAL change can come about through the mere shifting of power. Government is Government is power. The politics of power is Facism, whether it be Right or Left. I believe that the will of the individual is the only true course of change; acts of individual conscience I can judge on merit; acts of political/social motivation I condemn outright. I believe that the only freedom is the freedom of the will."

They also manage to make double LPs for three quid, etc, by making them and financing them themselves. Crass attribute their howling and abrasive style as a reflection on today's society - and I still don't understand them!

Well, that's it for now, sports fans. Hope you give some of the bands I've mentioned a listen, and while you're on, bend an ear to the fabulous Comsat Angels (we've GOT to do an interview with them soon), U2, The Lines, Associates... the list goes on.

Did you know that The Hollies hold the record for the most top 20 hits ever, and that I was almost a mole for MI5 in 1968...

T.H.Bogart.

C60LAND

Unfortunately, our intention to release a compilation tape of local talent fell through. The reasons for this are too lengthy and, quite frankly, too boring to document here, but out of all the chaos surrounding that intended project we've decided to start this C60Land series. What we hope will happen is that any local bands who have recorded some kind of demo tape will send them to us, telling us wether they intend selling the tape to the public, and allow us to review it and also cram as much information about the band into the review as our limited space permits.

Recording tapes is an excellent way of letting the public hear just how good your own particular outfit is, and it's a hell of a lot cheaper than releasing a self-financed single. Grant Goddard of Metro Radio has told me that he'd be willing to play tapes of local bands on his late-night Saturday programme, but he'll only be able to play good quality reel-to-reel tapes, so bear this in mind before you send off to him.

Send your cassettes to us now, giving all relevant details, and you could find yourself in our next issue!

Subject **Blue Lights Flashing**

Contributors Malcolm Reay, assisted by Jill Vose

Breakdown
I Can Tell
Original Text
A Place
What I Said

Tape Run 9mins 37secs

Availability 50p or blank cassette

Source 12 PATTINSON GDNS. FELLING

Classification Rough, raw and ready: it's a cheapie. The recording was done in the confines of Mr Reay's bedroom, and all the instruments are attributed to Malcolm - the Mike Oldfield of Felling, perhaps? I'm not sure where Ms Vose came in - maybe she kept Malcolm's mother away from the door! Anyway, it's very poor quality and scrappy, but at 50p, who can moan?

Subject **The Extras**

Contributors
Paul Campbell
Dave Renwick
Alan Daley
Steve Gardner

Breakdown
Magazine Romance
Time Is Up
Ballad Of The Bloke In His Room
Out Of Touch
Mad With Love

Tape Run 18mins 50secs

Availability £1·50 or blank cassette

Source 33 NORTHBOURNE ST., GATESHEAD

Classification E(long)gated lead breaks/ wailing sax/thumping, incessant bass/ pounding, emphatic drums/ and the singer sings in tune; Joe Jackson and Horslips - this really is Rock Music! I don't care that The Extras have stuck to the usual rock format, I don't care that it's all been done before. Forget the £1·50, send off the best tape you can get your hands on 'cos you'll play it, and play it, and play it...

Subject **Model Workers**

Contributors
Dougie Dunn
Andy McGarry
Paul Thompson
Shaun Leyland

Breakdown
Days So Good
Feel Good
At Those Times
Proud Land Of Ours

Tape Run 10mins 25secs

Availability £1 or blank cassette

Source 320 RECTORY RD., GATESHEAD

Classification Here is a young band who have projected themselves superbly on tape - I've lost count of the number of times I've played it. The Model Workers seem to be treading the well-worn path to Spandau Valley, and though I doubt that they will be able to compete with the experts in this field, their tape is still well worth a listen.

Subject **Marshall Hall Experience**

Contributors Marshall Hall
Steph
John Ward
Dave Simpson
Mic Hunter
Haz

Breakdown The Rhythm Turns Her On
What Do You Do For Kicks?
Hangman
Sexual Apprentice

Tape Run 14mins 26secs

Availability 50p plus blank cass.

Source 28 WHERNSIDE WALK, RYTON, TYNE AND WEAR

Classification The Marshall Hall Experience have drawn the best four songs from their energetic, not-to-be-missed live set. Unfortunately, the songs have lost a lot of their punch in the transition from stage to tape recorder, but if you're interested in how Steph lost his virginity, or how Marshall knows that 'the rhythm turns her on', send off a TDK and ten-bob tomorrow.

Subject **Beats Per Minute**

Contributors Willie Duggan
Bren O'Donnel
Steve Doyle
Julie Armstrong

Breakdown Not Famous Anymore
Heartbeat's Back
Turning Canary
Light Peculiar (Do The)

Tape Run 9mins 31secs

Availability Apply to source

Source 111 PRINCE CONSORT RD., GATESHEAD

Classification The only thing I know about this band is what's on the tape. It's definitely John Peel material, but with an aura of I've-heard-it-all-before. Julie Armstrong's angelic, innocent vocals sound nice enough, and the band play some haunting, melodic backing tracks. The mainstay of this band's sound, however, is Willie Duggan's highly inventive mandolin playing, which is a welcome divergence from the normal guitar format. All in all, hypnotic, compulsive listening.

BASSIST & DRUMMER

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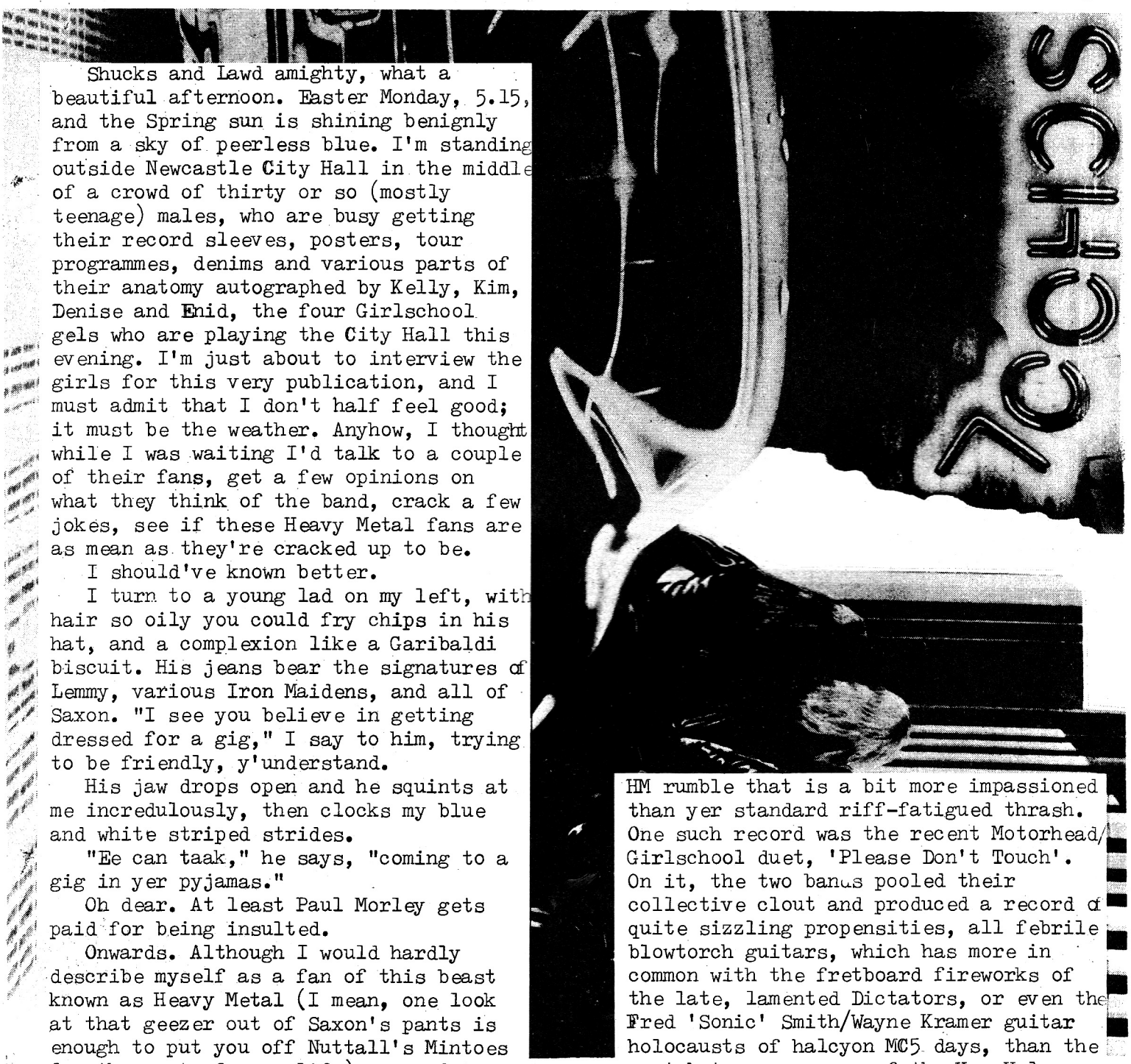
GIRLSCHOOL



Shucks and Lawd amighty, what a beautiful afternoon. Easter Monday, 5.15, and the Spring sun is shining benignly from a sky of peerless blue. I'm standing outside Newcastle City Hall in the middle of a crowd of thirty or so (mostly teenage) males, who are busy getting their record sleeves, posters, tour programmes, denims and various parts of their anatomy autographed by Kelly, Kim, Denise and Enid, the four Girlschool gels who are playing the City Hall this evening. I'm just about to interview the girls for this very publication, and I must admit that I don't half feel good; it must be the weather. Anyhow, I thought while I was waiting I'd talk to a couple of their fans, get a few opinions on what they think of the band, crack a few jokes, see if these Heavy Metal fans are as mean as they're cracked up to be.

I should've known better.

I turn to a young lad on my left, with hair so oily you could fry chips in his hat, and a complexion like a Garibaldi biscuit. His jeans bear the signatures of Lemmy, various Iron Maidens, and all of Saxon. "I see you believe in getting dressed for a gig," I say to him, trying to be friendly, y'understand.

His jaw drops open and he squints at me incredulously, then clocks my blue and white striped strides.

"Ee can taak," he says, "coming to a gig in yer pyjamas."

Oh dear. At least Paul Morley gets paid for being insulted.

Onwards. Although I would hardly describe myself as a fan of this beast known as Heavy Metal (I mean, one look at that geezer out of Saxon's pants is enough to put you off Nuttall's Mintoes for the rest of your life), on a few rare occasions I will admit that I do bend a not unappreciative ear to that odd HM rumble that is a bit more impassioned than yer standard riff-fatigued thrash. One such record was the recent Motorhead/Girlschool duet, 'Please Don't Touch'. On it, the two bands pooled their collective clout and produced a record of quite sizzling propensities, all febrile blowtorch guitars, which has more in common with the fretboard fireworks of the late, lamented Dictators, or even the Fred 'Sonic' Smith/Wayne Kramer guitar holocausts of halcyon MC5 days, than the mastubatory excesses of the Van Halens and AC/DCs of this world. So how'd the single come about, girls?

Kim:"It was a couple of people's ideas at first. We've got the same producer now as Motorhead (Vic Maile), and he'd really wanted to do that song for a long time. He never actually thought that it'd materialise, then a bloke at the record company said it'd be a good idea. So we tried it out in the studio, because we went in to start recording our album, so right at the start Motorhead came in with us, and we put down those three tracks."

Are there any more plans to do another record with Motorhead?

Kim:"I don't think so..."

Enid:"Once was enough!"

One criticism (amongst many) levelled against Heavy Metal is its sheer musical limitations. Heavy Metal first became a Major Force in the late 60's and early 70's as part of the Progressive (har har) scene, an all-encompassing umbrella which took in the likes of Barclay James Harvest, Yes, Blodwyn Pig (that's especially for T.H.Bogart), Pink Floyd and a zillion others. For music so 'progressive', it's amazing how its format has become so impacted, so fossilized. The accent is still on phallic guitar excess, volume violence, and emotional fascism. The only progression is in studio technique; it's now possible to make guitars sound as if they're being played in your living room.

But musically? You tell me. HM bands are also hamstrung by the expectations of their audience. Witness the decline in The Blue Oyster Cult's fortunes after they released their 'Mirrors' album in 1979. An ambitious, if faulted, attempt to cover a lot of new ground saw the band dropped like a hot turd, and even as sturdy a slab of hard-rock as last year's 'Cultosaurus Erectus' was not enough to regain lost ground. What do Girlschool think of HM's limitations, and its audiences' expectations?

Enid:"We try to do other things as well; we don't just go bash, bash, bash all the time. On the last album I thought we'd slotted in a couple of tracks that WE wanted to do, and at that time, we

thought that they (the fans) - well if they didn't like it, they just didn't like it. But they actually DO."

Kim:"They're quite dedicated and loyal, our fans. They usually stick with you unless you do something REALLY out of turn - then they don't like it."

Enid:"If you look at Led Zep, they'd stick in reggae tracks, all sorts of things, but they didn't lose any fans."

I suppose on a very basic level the very least you can say in defence of HM is that, like about 90% of bands playing rock'n'roll, from Duran Duran to Splodge, it is merely a harmless form of escape, a release from the everyday agonies of living. God knows, Britain is in a bad enough state, and kids should get their kicks while they can - BUT, whether Girlschool like it or not (I think they do), a four piece HM band IS political - at least on the level of sexual politics, working in a musical field in which women are frequently referred to as 'another piece of meat' or worse. Do the band see broader implications in what they're doing?

Enid:"'Not For Sale', which was on the first album, was about sexist marketing and advertising, so that was like an obvious subject that a male band would never write about, not a heavy band anyway. But a lot of our songs are about having a good time and we do have a pretty wide range of subjects. For instance 'Future Flash' on the last album is about The Bomb; so, about half our songs are quite serious, about things which are important to us. I mean, we're not trying to preach, but if something's important to you, you're naturally going to write about it. Then again, we do want kids to enjoy themselves."

Kelly:"I think you tend to sing and play better as well, if it's something you really believe in."

Enid:"The way I look at it, when people come to a gig, they don't really listen to the lyrics anyway. I know that when I go to see a band I don't really think about the lyrics, and when they

come to see us live it's the show, it's going out for an evening, it's having a good time, enjoying yourself - that's basically the whole point of it! But when it comes to the actual album, you've got a chance to listen to what the words are, and you hear a lot more subtleties. And I think it's far more important THEN that it's not just three chords."

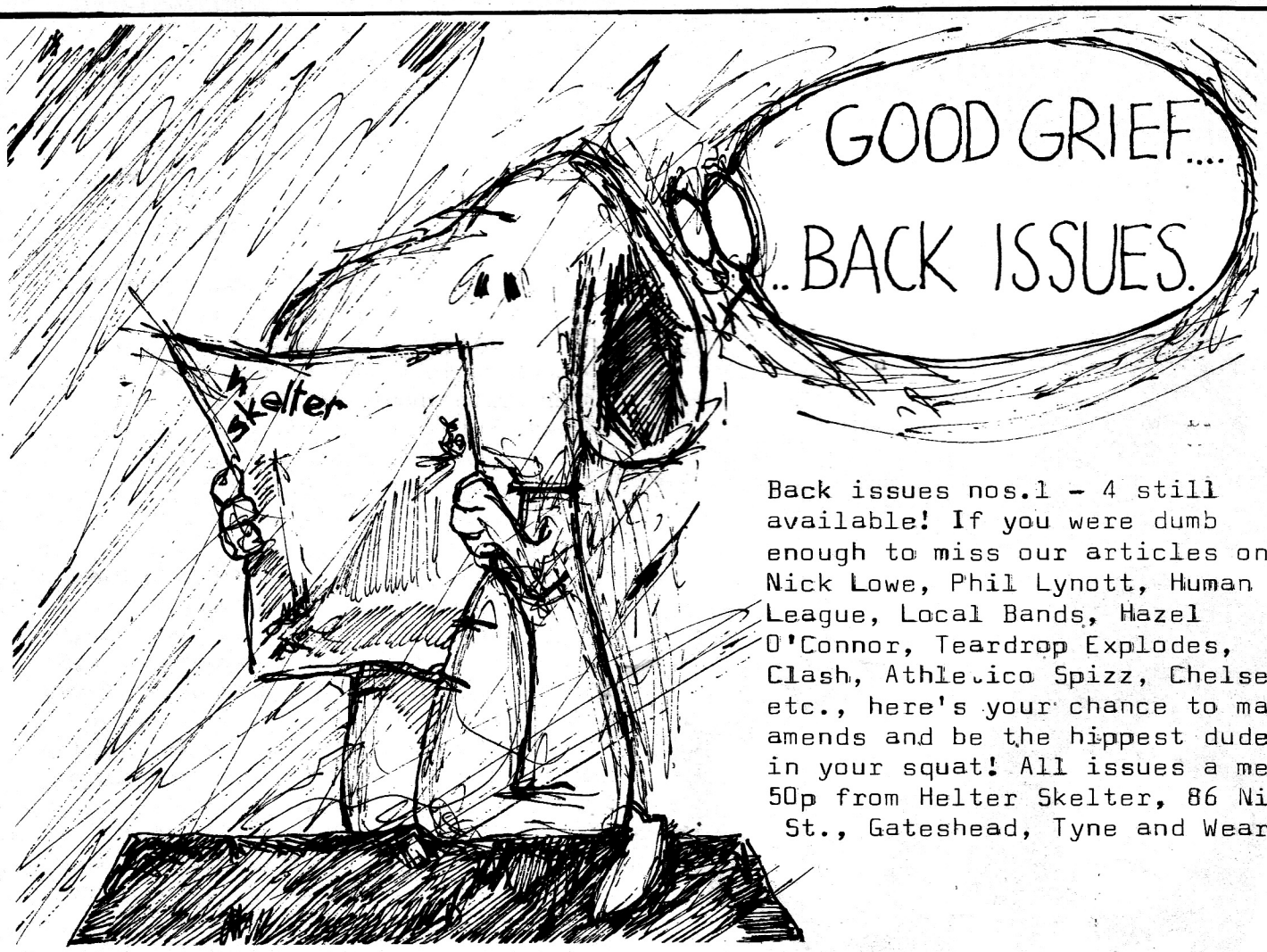
Kelly:"We have a couple of sets of lyrics which are the usual 'Going out, hitting the town' stuff, but the other songs - well, we didn't have to think whether we feel strongly about them - we just wrote 'em!"

The mainstream Rock Press' attitude to HM, and Girlschool in particular, is interesting too: it ranges from the gushing, effusive and perspective-less idolatory of Sounds (Deaf Barton and his cloth-eared cohorts), through to the maximum antipathy to HM displayed by NME. These days there's enough sitting on the fence, so I'm not going to, and side with the NME camp. However, the NME seem to have reached an odd no-persons land when faced with Girlschool. At times they even give them a slight amount of tepid praise, taking the line that 'If we have to like a Heavy Metal band, let's like Girlschool - but let's not go overboard.' Fair enough; I think it's a shade patronising, but what do the band think of the Press's labelling processes in general?

Enid:"Well, everyone is, aren't they, really?" (What's she fucking on about, Robinson - Ed.)

Kelly:"We're lucky, really, 'cos although we're under that big label classified 'HEAVY METAL', people do see different sides to us, which is good. Even the NME, they're not TOO much for us, they don't go over the top on us, they'd like to slag us, but they don't really find much to slag us off for."

It's not only the Press who have difficulty in coming to grips with the fact that it is possible for an all-girl HM band to exist without being exploited for their bodies or their scandal value; viz., the reaction of ageing rockist tosser, Jeff Beck. When Girlschool released their 'Race With Devil' single last year, Beck reacted to its playing on Round Table by saying he couldn't believe it was anything as wet as a bunch of GIRLS playing on the record. (Did you hear his single, 'The Final Peace, released last year? It's hard to believe that anyone HUMAN would want to put their



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name on that record. 'Love Is Blue' it isn't.) What did the band think of his comment? Were they offended?

Enid:"Well, he came to a gig afterward to see us..."

Kelly:"Yeah, he stayed ten minutes and pissed off! Before we went on, he went to a party! It's sort of insulting, what he said, but then again you can't blame him, 'cos there aren't too many girl bands around."

Enid:"It's just the general attitude. If you don't see girls playing, it doesn't really cross your mind that they CAN play. That's one reason why there aren't so many girl bands. I mean, before we actually started the band, you'd sit at home and watch Top Of The Pops every week, and you don't SEE girls playing, so you don't actually think it out - 'Why aren't there any girls playing in bands?' You think, 'There aren't any girl bands 'cos girls can't play'. It's a thing at the back of your mind, you just assume that, where the reasons are far deeper."

girl skool

In recent years there have been very few girl bands, or just individual girls working in the hard rock/HM arena. The early 70's had a few all-female outfits, like Fanny, Birtha and Mother Trucker; but they were all lousy, and were also victims of sexist marketing and advertising. (I remember when Probe Records launched Birtha, an American band, they used the horrible slogan, 'Birtha Has Balls' to promote them. Probe went bust not long afterwards. Tee hee.)

The only recent comparisons there could be with Girlschool are California's now-defunct Runaways. Although initially a kind of late 70's Monkees, being a manafactured group put together under the auspices of stunted svengali Kim Fowley, they (like the Monkees) actually turned out to be talented musicians, and did produce the odd few decent tracks, though they were often placed on some pretty execrable albums. However, the band were victims not only of a mass critical backlash, but also at the hands of an unscrupulous record company's shameful sales ploy. What about The Runaways, Girlschool?

Kelly:"I felt sorry for 'em, 'cos they WERE put together and a couple of 'em really did want to get on. Sandy West was a pretty fair drummer - she came to see us play at the Lyceum - and Joan Jett, she went out with her own band."

Enid:"Yeah, Sandy West was the best of The Runaways. The rest were just posed-up ... tarts!"

What about the packaging and marketing of women in rock, then?

Enid:"On one of The Runaways' albums, the second album, the sleeve had like five tiny pictures, and it had different parts of the body, like Cherrie Curry's tits, Lita Ford's bum, and underneath it had their names and ages. I thought, 'My God, that's the lowest of the low' - it's so pointless."

So much for women in rock's past. But what about the band's female counterparts and contemporaries, such as the Slits and The Raincoats?

Kelly:"I haven't actually heard anything by The Raincoats, but we sort of vaguely know 'em."

Enid:"I saw The Slits live once. I didn't think they were very good really. I heard their single, 'Typical Girls'; I liked it. But they were terrible live."

Kelly:"They did some really good stuff and some really dire stuff as well."

Enid:"I found that some of their ideas were quite good, quite interesting, but their playing wasn't really good enough to put their ideas across."

That latter point's debatable, I suppose; to me, The Slits are as good (or bad) musically as they need to be, but let's move on. When I asked what Girlschool listen to in the comfort of their own dormitory, Kelly and Enid answered as one:

"David Bowie!!"

Kelly:"I like Bill Nelson, too. Also The Comsat Angels, Joy Division, and Simple Minds."

Enid:"Yeah, I like Bill Nelson, too. Also Cheap Trick - all sorts! Anything that's good, we listen to. We like heavy music too, but we like to listen to just about anything."

girlschool

As you can see, Girlschool are pretty open-minded when it comes to their contemporaries - their influences are quite wide-ranging. Onstage, they're closer (in spirit) to the Ziggy-period Spiders From Mars outfit than Saxon et al. I mention the paralells to be drawn between HM bands and the original Punk movement of 76/77, not the American variant, or the Oi! Oi! brand touted by The Cockney Rejects and their sheepdip colleagues. Although the ideology is different, the high-energy factor is quite similar.

Kelly:"Yeah, you can connect lots of things musically and audience-wise with the Punk thing and Heavy Metal. Some Punk bands just played so loud and fast and the kids went mad - what's the difference? Punk was only different when it first came out, the spirit of it."

Enid:"Heavy Metal was getting really stale, I mean I liked Led Zep, but you get bored with the same band year after year after year, and they weren't really doing anything very creative. It was essential that the Punk thing came along."

Kelly:"Yeah, that introduced a lot of girls on the scene."

Enid:"Yeah, 'cos the thing about New Wave was that it was acceptable to form a band, even if you couldn't play, when it wasn't before, and so it encouraged a lot of girls."

Talk of New Wave leads on the the, ahem, 'New Wave of British Heavy Metal', a totally media-concocted notion, the main instigators being the staff of Sounds magazine. Is there such an animal?

Kelly:"It was the Press that coined that phrase - Sounds, I think - and it just snowballed. Obviously, it was just the next thing to come along, a rehash of what had gone before, perhaps influenced by the Punk thing, the energy bit, and tight jeans instead of flares!! That's the NEW bit of it!"

Yeah, but what about your colleagues - I mean, Saxon are old blokes!

Kelly: (placing finger over microphone) "I can't stand Saxon!"

Enid:"They've been going quite a long time under another name - Son Of A Bitch, I think."

Kelly:"Yeah, a lot of our fans from Sheffield saw 'em then and said they were DIRE! Suddenly - New Wave of British HM - Bang! They're out there - new name, Saxon. They've got nuffink!"

Enid:"They were going for at least... what was it? Twelve years now?"

Kelly:"You're joking!"

Enid:"Nah, it's at least ten years."

Kelly:"You're kidding!"

Enid:"Nah, that's what a girl told me, a fan-cum-groupie or whatever."

Kelly:"Can't stand the singer anyway."

Enid:"To be honest, there aren't that many HM bands I'm very crazy about. I like Motorhead a lot, because they're so fun and exciting, they've got their own original sound."

Kelly:"There's not many new bands I'm into. I haven't seen many anyway."

Onstage, I thought the band were quite interesting. Some of their songs were well structured, terse, quite melodic really, less reliant on the great God of the Riff than say their support band, the youthful but absolutely horrendous A To Z, whom Kelly was awfully polite about. The guitarist kept playing solos which sounded like someone chucking metal buckets down Dog Leap Stairs. What about the more melodic strain in their songs?

Kelly:"It's difficult to come up with really catchy little melodies, but we do look for it, and we build songs half around that and half around a riff. So it still appeals to the headbangers, with the riff running through it, but it's got a bit of a tune, a bit of a melody for everybody else."

Enid:"I suppose we're trying to write songs that we ourselves like to listen to. I mean, we like songs that are lively, but we like catchy things as well."

Kelly:"Yeah, stuff you can sing along to - I love pop songs!"

So there you have it. Girlschool, to me, are an important group not just because of their sex status, playing in a music business which is already loaded against them, but also because of their role as an important influence on other members of their own sex in forming their own groups, learning to play and stake their claim in a musical area where previously their position in life was primarily to be on their knees, sucking. While Paul Morley, in a recent NME article, crawls all over the place trying to say why a female HM band shouldn't exist because of the ironies and double standards inherent in the music's make-up, Girlschool just get on with it, playing it and walking it like they talk it.

My position? In a way, I agree with Morley; I don't really like their music all that much, but in them, I can see some hope, a little light in the murk.

Girlschool are alright by me.

Allan Robinson

THE THOMPSON TWINS: A Product Of Participation

And it came to pass that the fabulous Thompson Twins finally released their debut platter, and some thought it great whilst others merely disregarded it, labelling it part of the New Psychedelia - whatever that is. Other bands lumbered with this asinine tag include Teardrop and The Bunnymen, so I think it might serve some purpose in the magazine to say at this time - THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A 'NEW PSYCHEDELIA MOVEMENT!!!! The Thompson Twins, like the aforementioned, are a clever group of pop-and-style fanatics who, despite sounding a bit pretentious at times, certainly bang out a good chewn when required; 'psychedelia' doesn't come into it.

Having said all that, I must now add that taking all things into consideration, 'A Product Of...' isn't quite as good as I'd expected. The problem would appear to be the band's reluctance to ruthlessly edit the length of many of the tracks, thus allowing the songs the opportunity to make their short, sharp point and then move on to pastures afresh. 'Could Be Her ...Could Be You', with its clever intro of backward tapes and jangling guitar, suffers seriously from the lack of a no-nonsense producer to fade out the tedious parts.

When the songs are kept to a sensible and considered length, however, as on 'When I See You' and 'Anything Is Good Enough', the Thompson twins prove without doubt that they have much to offer. 'When I See you', in particular, is a no-pap slice of UK pop, second to nothing that I've heard this year. Surprising then that the single from the album is the very least commercial/representative/interesting cut to be found, 'Oumma Aularesso (Animal Laugh)'.

Outstanding throughout are guitarists John Rcog and Peter Dodd and drummer Chris Bell proves to be no slouch either.

Oi'll give it foive.

Mal Armstrong

COMPILATION N.E.1, album review

Every football fan knows that Sunderland have a superior football team to Newcastle - they are in the first division, in case you didn't know, or didn't care - and now, to add insult to injury, Sunderland has produced the only current sampler album of North East groups. (Newcastle did, however, produce the first: Bedrock's 'All Together' in 1977.) The album is, hopefully, the first in a series to be released by the newly-formed Sunderland Musicians Collective, and although very much a Sunderland venture, certain influences have filtered through: The Fashionable Impure, Genocide Exit and The Rhythm Methodists all use Tyneside as their base; Negative Throb hail from West Carnforth; and The DT's are unlucky enough to come from Peterlee.

A varying number of musical styles are incorporated on the album, and although it's not an across-th-board selection, it is to a certain extent representative of the North East 'scene'.

By far the best track/group on the album must surely be 'Venu Sanctus Spiritus' by the enigmatic Fashionable Impure, who's scund is King Crimson and early Floyd transported into the 80's. Don't get me wrong, the band are in no way copyists, but have added another dimension to the so-called Psychedelic movement and must surely be the band to 'make it' via this album.

Another band featured on side one and in hot contention with The Fashionable Impure are The Rhythm Methodists with their very strange but punchy 'Peanut Gang'. Also outstanding is side two's opener from the energetic Toy Dolls. A typical Dolls' song with the colloquial title of 'Worky Ticket', it's fast and furious, with Olga's cutting, gutsy guitar playing as menacing as ever.

Compilation albums, it's true to say, take a lot of listening to before a definate impression builds up. More so with 'Compilation N.E.1': sixteen tracks from sixteen bands is more than a morsel to swallow, plus the comparative anonymity of some of the bands makes comparisons with previous work difficult to say the least.

Certainly worth the investment, however.

Colin Green

JAPAN

4.15 at a certain hotel in Nottingham. After checking in, began to search for a lift to the second floor. Several attempts later, decided to give up and take the stairs. Good grief! What's this? Blonde, beautifully coiffured hair, face immaculately made-up - yes, it's got to be: David Sylvian and the rest of Japan leaving for the sound-check.

Heart pumping nervously, I approach him. "I'm from Helter Skelter magazine; do you think there could be any chance of an interview?"

Dave gives a beaming smile and turns to drummer Steve Jansen who nods his approval. "Sure, we'll be back in three or four hours, see you then."

I breathe a sigh of relief: first obstacle over.

7.45 in the foyer of the same hotel, waiting patiently for the group to return, camera and tape machine at the ready. The white mini-bus pulls up outside, and the band wander into the hotel. Dave recognises me straight away.

"How long have you to spare?" I enquire.

"Plenty of time," he smiles, and we walk up to room 305.

The band buzz around for a few minutes. I sit next to Dave Sylvian and Mick Karn on the sofa; Steve Jansen and Richard Barbieri pull up a couple of chairs; Rob Dean sits a little out of it on the bed, next to a Japanese girl who is accompanying them.

At first I was rather nervous, but they made me feel relaxed almost at once. I posed my first question, wanting to know how they felt about doing their first major tour of Britain. After all, since they'd started they'd just done support and one-off gigs. David Sylvian started the ball rolling.

"Well, we were looking forward to it. It's been such a long time since we toured Britain. We're not sure if it's going to be any different from how it was a couple of years ago. We stopped doing it then because we weren't enjoying it; it becomes too much of a routine."

Mick Karn interrupts. "Yeah, we were really looking forward to it. It's the first time we've been out of London for a few years - just to move out of London is an experience!"

I reminded them of the support tour they did with Blue Oyster Cult, and the negative reaction they received from the audience.

Mick: "We were just mis-matched, we were asking for it really."

Which is very true. How much farther removed from Japan can you get than Blue Oyster Cult? I ask whether now, because of the futurist movement, they feel that they are likely to become more accepted.

Dave:"It seems so. I mean the audiences have really got bigger - doubled, tripled to what it was. I don't know what they expect though, whether they come out of curiosity or because they think that we started the whole movement."

Mick:"We thought a lot of the people who were at the gigs at the Lyceum and Hammersmith were there, not to see us, but because it was the right place to be seen in at that time."

And do they class themselves as innovators of the movement, and fall into the futurist category along with the likes of Visage and Spandau Ballet?

"No, not at all," answers Steve Jansen very definitely "because, for a start, the whole concept behind the thing is that they're into the image more than the music, which is something we've never done, although it might have appeared that way. We've alway considered the music as the most important factor - the image is just a personal thing."

Speaking of image, you do seem to have changed yours quite drastically from the 'Adolescent Sex' days up until now.

Dave:"Well, it's just that you grow up. I mean, we were quite young when we were doing 'Adolescent Sex'. When you grow up you go through different changes and you become quite different people. We consider the clothes to be an extension of the people that wear them. If you change dramatically as a person, then your clothes are bound to change."

I move on and ask guitarist Rob Dean about his decision to leave the band.

He hesitates. "Well, it's just so I can have the freedom to do a lot of the things I can't do with the band. I've got a few ideas I'd like to work on."

Could you expand on that?

"No, that's all I'm going to say at the moment."

Will their be a replacement for Rob?

Dave:"No, because when we start working on the new album we're planning to use various musicians."

Mick:"It leaves us free to use all the instruments we want, and it also brings a freshness back into the group. Which means that the idea of the thing was best for both sides. It was a mutual decision."

Does this new freshness mean that Richard Barbieri, the keyboards player, will be writing more songs, following up 'The Experience Of Swimming', which was featured on the free single given with 'Gentlemen Take Polaroids'?

Richie:"Probably not on the album - not on the next one anyway. We don't want things to get mixed up. It always works that Dave writes the songs for the albums, so he gets a whole general feel; we can't have another person coming in who might disrupt that feel.

"I would like to write more songs, and no doubt there will be occasions."

I ask about their origins and, of course, their first album, 'Adolescent Sex'. I am curious to know why they have dropped all the songs off the album from their set.

Richie laughs:"We can't stand the album!"

Steve:"Yeah, we can't listen to it anymore, we can't relate to it. When we finished it, it was just like getting a weight off your shoulders. Some of the songs were from 1976 and stayed with us right up until we put them on record, and it was just a matter of getting them out of the way. They weren't a representation of the way we were feeling at the time."

Moving onto the newer stuff, how do Japan feel about the constant comparisons to Roxy Music that have been thrown at them since 'Quiet Life' and 'Gentlemen Take Polaroids'?

Dave:"In the beginning, when we were doing 'Adolescent Sex', all the comparisons we got were the New York Dolls; then 'Obscure Alternatives' - people who heard that related it to Bowie. I think people always look for the nearest comparison they can make. The people who do that aren't listening to the music for what it is; they don't relate to it. If you relate to something, you immediately don't criticise it, you don't start looking for faults, you just accept it and you say 'Yes, this I really like'. People such as critics have to look at it objectively and have to explain in words what they think it sounds like, and that's why you always get comparisons."

So you don't have any influence from Roxy Music at all?

"It's hard to say. I like Roxy Music, but if I thought I'd gained influence from just one area like that, I'd have such a guilty conscience."

Do you mind these comparisons?

Dave:"Of course I mind. I mean, comparisons are OK, but some take it to the extreme and say we're ripping them off."

Mick:"That's when the criticism becomes too personal."

Steve:"People catch on to the idea of it as well, one starts it off and the rest automatically keep it up."

I agree emphatically and there decide to take my leave. I was not pressured into leaving and left feeling very excited that I still had the gig to come

11.30pm, Nottingham's Rock City: a plushed up version of Newcastle's Mayfair, full of the people I'd been discussing with the band a few hours earlier. On average, I would say that half the audience were there for the pose, a quarter to see the band out of curiosity, and a quarter were genuine fans. Such a bloody shame.

A taped intro of 'Burning Bridges' was played, and the band strolled on stage, Mick Karn sporting his new badger style haircut.

They kicked off with the excellent 'Swing', and followed with tracks mostly taken from 'Quiet Life' and 'Gentlemen Take Polaroids'. Highlights of the evening for me were 'Rhodesia' with Mick Karn's sinister, pounding bass; 'Obscure Alternatives', 'Alien' - and just about everything else! 'Taking Islands In Africa', which was co-written by David Sylvian and Sakamoto of The Yellow Magic Orch, was a disappointment, but current single, 'Art Of Parties', which followed was immaculate.

Encores included 'Life In Tokyo', which is currently on release by Ariola Records as a 12" single, and will always remain one of their best tracks.

11.30 Friday morning back at the hotel. I'm checked-out and ready to leave. The band saunter downstairs and immediately I am recognised. I corner shy Richie Barbieri and tell him that I thought last night's gig was great.

"Thanks, I'm really glad you enjoyed it," he smiles.

And I believe he genuinely was. Japan are a bunch of unpretentious, mature, helpful and friendly guys who put on no airs or graces and, take my word for it, have the art of parties off to a tee!

Karen Barrett

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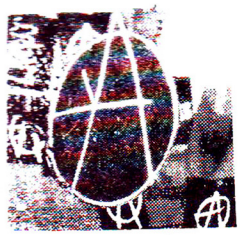

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